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The Poem

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Two Poems · *Richard Moore*

THE POEM

A Farewell to My Students

I

Across the big pond, builders' cranes,
petrified insects in the sunset,
all of the same species: the same
side strut with a filament hanging from each
tip. Really a cable.

What's *really*?

Between our dreamed real and one's real dream
a personality grinds out like sausage.
It must be found and not invented,
an absolute, the Archangel fallen
into the poem. We watch him climb out
at the end onto some phrase like, say,
the incredible levelness of the water,
suggesting clarity, permanence,
but only on calm days and at sunset.
And we are aware finally of his quiet
irony, his whisper of mysticism.

II

But bursting suddenly through the fence,
through the private hole I use (how dare they!)
a boy-crowd monster with screaming heads
(I can't bear to count them) people-fragments
with fat cheeks and castrati voices,
faces that twist into pouts and pimples,
skew-toothed grins under spikes of hair,
filaments swinging from their noses.

Medicine made them, and mismatched parents.
They swarm over the shore, take no notice,
and having obliterated my poem,
they pick up things and into the water
fling fist-sized stones, two-handed stones —
and finally flat little stones that they skip,
charmed at last by the pond's calm.

Surprisingly good at that — though, of course,
just children, searching the pebbly shore,
tricky to find . . . I know. I remember.
I could bring years of practice to this.
My poem is gone now, sunk in a moment,
and I stand, dream-drawn, gaze — and a perfect
stone separates from the mass of stones.
I do as it bids, bend, pick it up,
take the right stance by the silent boys,
cock arm, and the stone rips from the finger,
flies unwavering over the water,
and touches its ringlets, dip and dip and dip . . .
my finest throw in years. The boys
cry out in awe, counting the steps
of the stone on the water, and, as I reach
the fence, “Hey, mister, can you do that again?”
Little scientists! But they're beautiful now.
“No I can't,” I say.

“How did you do it?”

“I said a *prayer*.”

The prayer, of course,
was the poem: that poem, which is this poem,
and as the Archangel said, watching God's level
water: nor was I ever out of it.